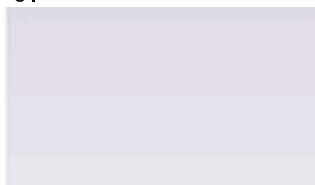


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Wednesday, November 22, 2006

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235 kids find homes

On National Adoption Day, Michigan is tops

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

Stephanie Lynn Guthrie got a Nintendo hand-held game for her 11th birthday this week, but her greatest gift was a place to call home.

Stephanie was adopted Tuesday by her uncle, Joseph Jaskulski of Taylor, during a statewide celebration of National Adoption Day. Local families adopted 235 children in 36 courtrooms, making Michigan the nation's top state for the number of places where adoption celebrations were held.

In a Wayne County courtroom decorated with balloons, Stephanie stood before Chief Judge Mary Beth Kelly and said she wanted Jaskulski to be her legal guardian.

"I know he'll always take care of me. I have someone I can always look up to and he will love me forever and ever," Stephanie said.

Michigan began participating four years ago in National Adoption Day, held around Thanksgiving every year in most states.

"This is something that is very important to the families," said Cynthia Billey, coordinator of National Adoption Day. "But it helps raise awareness that there are kids right in your community that need a home."

Tuesday's celebrations included some children who were adopted from overseas, but the majority of the adopted children came from the state's foster care system.

Children enter the foster system after investigators determine they have been a

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victim of neglect or abuse. Though state officials work to reunite parents with their children, that is not always possible because some parents lose their rights to their children, making them available for adoption.

National Adoption Day was a reminder that 6,200 children are waiting to be adopted, according to Kirsta Grapentine of the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange. Approximately 90 percent of those will get adopted by their foster parents or relatives, Grapentine said, but 300-600 children are still looking for a permanent home at any time.

Among the adoptive parents on Tuesday were Willie and LaVerne Young, a Detroit couple in their 60s who have already raised their own five children. They decided to adopt their grandchildren, Shawna, 3, and Jasmine, 1 1/2, after state officials removed them from their daughter's home.

"I didn't want them to be in foster care when we can take care of them," said Willie Young.

Other couples were like Linda and Matt Wells, who are unable to have their own children. A year and a half ago, the Woodhaven couple became foster parents to Miranda, 4, and Michael, 3. On Tuesday, the Wells adopted the siblings. The couple considered going overseas but then decided to look locally.

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Dawn Trembath holds daughter Kate, who is from South Korea, at Wayne Circuit Court during National Adoption Day. About 6,200 kids are waiting to be adopted in Michigan. See full image

Want to adopt?

You can be single or married.

You can either rent or own a home, but you must have adequate bedroom space for each child adopted.

You don't have to become a foster parent first.

The Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange can help prospective adoptive parents. Call (800) 589-6273 or go to its Web site at <http://www.mare.org>.

Costs

There is no fee to adopt a child from the foster care system. Prospective parents are responsible for court costs, however.

Adoption fees for an international adoption can range from \$10,000 to \$25,000.

Source: Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange



Miranda Wells gives Chief Judge Mary Beth Kelly a hand with adoption cases. Miranda and her 3-year-old brother, Michael, were among 235 children adopted Tuesday. See full image

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